

have to go down an inside staircase to reach the studio, on the level of the second floor or even between the first and second, for I fancy that the house has two studios for every three floors. A universal man, B, indulges-with the same genius and no shame whatever-in sculpture, engraving, and oil painting. Right now he would like to make stage sets for R. Like many today, he proves to himself that he is a colorist by using only the crudest colors; he has a cruel eye. He intends to achieve mystery by neglecting drawing. You can recognize in a large clay woman, half-naked, the same model as in a big portrait reproducing the harmonies of a wild parrot (buttercup background, aspidistra-green dress, tomato-colored book in her hand): his wife.

Considerable time is spent in seeking the pose I am to take. As soon as I am settled, I like the long silence of this study; I, usually so easily distracted by some muscular impatience, I find that this forced immobility invites my thought to roam; but B. wants to talk. I foresee even worse: twice, smiling at the sheet of metal he is cutting into, he said: "There is someone upstairs who is burning to meet you." Suddenly, starting at a little sound from the upper floor—which must be a signal:

"Vera! Vera! You know that Monsieur Gide is here. We are expecting you!"

The woman of the portrait comes down the steps smiling at my reflection in a large mirror in front of which I am posing.

Mme B. was born on Reunion Island, whence the sparkle of her lips and the languor in her eyes. Without a corset, the points of her well-formed breasts can be seen through the tussah silk of her dress; voluptuous face and body; auburn hair arranged in a turban. A little more familiarity with women would have warned me that the beautiful Vera wrote and that she planned to take advantage of my pose in order to inflict a reading on me. The conversation (for

which, moreover, I was as little as possible responsible, for fear of breaking my pose) had no other purpose than to lead up to that reading. But they had to attack the subject from a distance. B. told me his desire to add two women to his album. "Probably Madame Curie . . . and, on the other hand, Madame de Noailles." But this first attempt not having started anything, the conversation was falling off when, at some turning or other, after we had talked of the husband's universal gifts, quite innocently I asked:

"And you, madame, what do you do?"

"I? Oh, nothing/" she replied in haste.

A silence during which B., leaning over his sheet of metal, smiles with a knowing air, then, cupping his hand as if to keep his voice from anyone but me:

"She writes"

Whereupon V&ra: "Will you be quiet! How absurd he is! Monsieur Gide, don't listen to him. . . . Can it be called 'writing' when all you